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ABSTRACT

Fingerplays are enjoyable and versatile additions to program activities and can provide an informal opportunity to practice manipulative and coordination skills. As an instructional supplement in a variety of content areas, this form of dramatic play fosters the development of intellectual and language skills. Caregivers of young children often choose to use fingerplays as a positive management technique. Fingerplays can be easily incorporated into program activities as spontaneous learning experiences, transitions, and instructional supplements. Techniques for helping children learn fingerplays are simple and direct, and the mutual participation of both caregivers and children in making up fingerplays is a satisfying experience for all. (Author/RH)

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Fingerplay: A Useful Tool and Enjoyable Art

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Fingerplays are a special form of dramatic play requiring few props other than fingers and several common imagined verses. Fingerplays capture in a unique way the spontaneous finger movements of children and the enchanting language of childhood storytelling. As an art form, fingerplays are eclectic encompassing drama, literature, music, and games. Like hide and seek, marbles, and tag, fingerplays have endured over the years and are used today in much the same way as in earlier years. Tradition suggests that fingerplays have been used principally for entertainment. Finger dramatization of stories continues to be popular because it is an easy and enjoyable art to practice.

Fingerplays have two parts: finger action and fingerplay verse. Finger action is the manipulation of hands and fingers to interpret the verse or provide rhythmic accompaniment. Fingerplay verses are typically short, self-contained stories or descriptions, appealing because of the rhymes, the subject addressed, or the syncopated repetition of sounds and ideas. Verse and finger action combine to produce the finely choreographed dramatization of a fingerplay.

Parents and caregivers use fingerplays with young children. Old favorites for parent and child are "patty-cake" and "this little piggy." Caregivers of young children often use "Eensey, Weensey Spider" or "This Old Man". Fingerplays are clearly part of the informal educational experiences of most young children. However, parents and teachers of young children can greatly supplement play and work time by recognizing the role of fingerplays in early experience. Closer examination of fingerplays reveals that fingerplays provide both parents and caregivers with the opportunity to foster the development of many physical-motor,

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intellectual and language skills. In program settings, adults can use fingerplays as effective group and individual management tools. Many fingerplays lend themselves to instructional purposes because of the content of the verse. Fingerplays are appropriate, effective, and instructional.

Developmental Aspects of Fingerplays

The physical-motor aspect of fingerplays includes several developmental skills. The most obvious skill in this area is the refinement of the muscles of the hand and fingers. Shaping, bending, and flexing fingers to create action for the fingerplay verse provides opportunity to refine the more natural gross movements of the hand and fingers. Fingerplays, like stringing beads, cutting, pasting, and coloring, are manipulative activities which promote muscular growth and coordination.

In the young child's experience, many activities are designed to foster eye-hand coordination. Handling of prewriting tools such as paintbrushes, chalk, and large crayons requires the child to focus the eyes on his hand. Fingerplays require similar eye-hand coordination as the child seeks to coordinate the finger actions with the fingerplay. In group situations children will naturally seek to meet the tempo and sequence of the group or fingerplay's leader, thus practicing eye-hand coordination involving matching self-movements to those of others.

Intellectual and Language Aspects of Fingerplays

Fingerplay verses require memorization. Children learn verses to match with finger actions at appropriate times in the fingerplay. As children become more facile with fingerplays, many move on to creating fingerplay verses and actions of their own, exercising both intellectual and language skills simultaneously. Fingerplays foster the growth of language and speech. As the child uses appropriate speech sounds which convey the meaning of his finger actions, he practices

and improves pronunciation and develops proper enunciation. Through fingerplays children can be encouraged to use clear, distinct speech and voice projection. While listening to and thinking about the verses a caregiver shares, the child may strengthen comprehension and auditory memory skills. Reciting fingerplay verses may extend the child's listening and speaking vocabulary and strengthen sequencing skills.

Fingerplays as Management Tools

When working with young children it is often necessary to manage their learning environment. Caregivers of young children may find it beneficial to use fingerplays as a management technique. Fingerplays can be used to motivate, build transition between activities, and allow for the release of energy. These techniques can be incorporated into any group or individual situation. When young children become restless, bored, or inattentive something is needed to regain their interest. When moving from one activity to another it is helpful to channel children's attention to the up-coming task. Often children are involved in quiet activities that may need to be followed by the opportunity for a release of energy. The caregiver who can select or design appropriate fingerplays to use in these situations may find a smooth integrated curriculum eliminating the need for other less positive forms of management.

Fingerplays are time-fillers that have redeeming positive value. Many times programs, events and scheduled happenings are not quite as tightly sequenced as caregivers would wish. Small blocks of time, often unexpected, must suddenly be filled. Fingerplays provide such convenient "hip-pocket" curriculum fillers. Any time, any place, all the props will be there and a few minutes of empty time, with the potential for distraction and disruption, can profitably be used for instructional extension or sheer enjoyment of fingerplay participation. Few other management tools are so versatile and universally applicable.

Instructional Role of Fingerplays

Instruction in programs for young children is frequently carried out in informal settings which eschew the disciplined format of lesson plans, scheduled work times, and follow-up written work. The lack of formality does not obscure to the observant eye the presence of developmental goals and the unifying threads of content and hands-on experience with objects and ideas that are embedded in such settings. Traditional content areas such as math, science, reading, etc., fit into larger organizational categories of communications, expressive arts, problem-solving, and social science as children seek to challenge and master their everyday world.

Communication. Communication content includes the expressive and receptive skills acquired through the young child's involvement in the beginning stages of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Fingerplays are an obvious vehicle for extending storytelling techniques, interpreting through gestures the meaning of stories children have been told. Caregivers are most likely to have some experience, though probably limited, using fingerplay in storytelling situations.

Other areas of the curriculum which extend communication skills involve show and tell, group planning time, the house corner, and many specialized centers. In many of these activity areas fingerplays can be used as an adjunct to the major thrust of the curriculum area. For example, in activities centered around the use of the telephone, a common piece of equipment in program settings, children listen to voices, speak to others, read the necessary letters and numbers on the dial, and write phone numbers and pretended messages. Whether to motivate, build transitions, or allow for release of energy, various telephone fingerplays may be used to expand the instructional possibilities of the activities. Possible ideas are selected or designed about dialing, conversation, manners, and recording messages:

I can open up the telephone book,
And find the number if I just look.
Then I dial that number carefully,
And wait for someone to answer me. Hello!

Expressive Arts. Many forms of expressive arts are used in early childhood programs. Dance, drama, music, and art are components of the expressive arts curriculum. Fingerplays used in these areas may occur in the context of individual arts or they may be integrated into the curriculum. In this fingerplay, art is discussed as an isolated content area:

Today I'm going to play with clay
I'll push it, and pull it, and pound it this way.
I may make a ball or maybe a log,
And put them together to make a dog.

This fingerplay, however, uses art as a medium to convey desirable work habits:

I have my paint, I have my brush
I must remember not to rush,
For when I'm working carefully
The paint won't spill all over me.

Problem-solving. Problem-solving areas, such as math and science, lend themselves readily to the incorporation of fingerplays into instructional settings. Of all the content areas into which fingerplays may be integrated, it is the category of science and math which includes the bulk of fingerplays. Plants, animals, and the human body parts are the major areas of the young child's science world. Fingerplays about these subjects may be instrumental in furthering the child's understanding of growth processes, and environmental effects on living and nonliving organisms. As the fingers become the fuzzy wuzzy caterpillar which humps along, spins a worm cocoon, and evolves into a butterfly, the life cycle of this insect is identified and recited about in the appropriate sequence. Forming a watering can by cupping the hands, then sprinkling water on the planted seeds which symbolically grow into flowers by wiggling the fingers while raising hands in the air toward the hand formed circular sun identifies to participants that plants need

care and attention for proper growth.

A can of water I'm holding here,
To sprinkle on seeds I planted this year.
Watching them grow is a great deal of fun,
As they grow very tall reaching up to the sun.

In the area of math, verses may be formulated to foster growth in the young child's understanding of numbers and numerals, size, place value, measurement, geometric figures, fractions, shapes, and relationships such as one-to-one correspondence. Studies in comparisons may be demonstrated including spatial relations like above-below, on-off, and inside-outside. Temporal relations too, such as first, next, or last, can be exemplified through fingerplay activities.

Social Science. The broad category of social science includes the very personal feelings and emotions of the young child, all the immediate social happenings of a child's world, and the larger world of all children in all cultures. Introducing a new class member or discussing the arrival of a sibling are events which may be categorized as social science happenings. Included here are activities involving occurrences between family members, friends, or anyone who has an effect on the lives of others. Whether these occurrences involve new situations, special occasions, or everyday community life, the children experience growth in human relationships.

Fingerplays about new experiences for children may include taking a trip, making acquaintances, or examining cultures. Special occasions would be those important days such as birthdays and holidays or anytime something new or unusual is happening. Community life studies may be designed to portray the independence and interdependence of community members.

After singing songs, making puppets, or hearing stories about the fireman or the policeman as community helpers, children may gain further insight into the

duties of these persons by engaging in fingerplay activities about them. Study and exploration of vocations continue as children practice the hammering and sawing of the carpenter or the cutting and stitching of the tailor.

Incorporating Fingerplays in Program Settings

Most caregivers recognize the value of fingerplays in work with young children. The incidental physical-motor exercise that fingerplays provide, coupled with the obvious intellectual and language experience embedded in fingerplays provides more than sufficient rationale for deliberately using fingerplays in program settings. The possible use of fingerplays as a management tool provides an additional incentive for caregivers to actively prepare and incorporate fingerplays into program activities. Caregivers will benefit from following specific guidelines and techniques in incorporating fingerplays into program activities; though ultimately, each caregiver will adopt styles of use for fingerplays that reflect personal skills as well as techniques for use that reflect the interests of the particular group of children in the program. However, general guidelines and descriptions of fingerplay techniques will provide a smorgasbord from which individual caregivers can select appealing strategies and refine their existing techniques.

At any time a number of strategies for using fingerplays with young children may be employed in a program setting. The least formal strategy, called "spontaneous incorporation," relies on the caregiver to learn and present fingerplays at naturally occurring appropriate moments. A second, and more formal, deliberate use of fingerplays is at transition times. "Transition uses" of fingerplays again require the caregiver to learn and present fingerplays, but in a much more routine fashion.. Rather than waiting for naturally occurring moments, the caregiver deliberately seeks to incorporate fingerplays at transitional times in the program.

The third, and most formal, use of fingerplays is as "instructional supplements" so that each child learns and can repeat the fingerplay for instructional practice and extension. This last use of fingerplays requires a set of "sharing techniques" on the part of the caregiver that will enable children to quickly and efficiently learn selected fingerplays. The next sections will describe in detail a rationale, general examples and sources for fingerplays in each of the previous categories of use: spontaneous incorporation, transition use, and instructional supplements.

Spontaneous incorporation. It is difficult to work with young children for any length of time and not spontaneously use fingerplays, either dredging up old fingerplays from one's own childhood or remembering some from one's training experiences in methods courses. Often, too, children will provide the fingerplay material for spontaneous use in programs as they gaily discover a verse or rhyme that lends itself to fingerplay use. Whatever the source of inspiration, informal use of fingerplays is probably the most frequently encountered technique for incorporating fingerplays into programs. Spontaneous use lends itself nearly to the quickly changing interests and tempo of young children's interests and require the least amont of substantial advance preparation on the part of the caregiver. A spontaneous fingerplay captures once again the joy and entertainment that have made fingerplays such a perennial part of childhood games.

To use fingerplays effectively in a spontaneous mode requires that caregivers be sensitive to appropriate moments for incorporation. An effectively timed fingerplay will capture the spirit of the moment and be as natural to the activity as any other verbal comment or hands-on activity might be. An ill-timed fingerplay will come across to children like cold left-overs, or even worse an ill-timed fingerplay will dampen the mood of the moment and possibly diffuse and redirect children's activity away from chosen goals. General rules for the spontaneous

incorporation of fingerplays in program activities must, of necessity, be interpreted in the context of the actual situation. In seeking to insert fingerplays in program activities, caregivers should look for situations in which the general level of either verbal activity or physical hand motion is high, thus picking up on the tempo of the situation with a fingerplay. Matching the content of the fingerplay to either the content of the children's speech or the activity's hand motions is some insurance that the fingerplay will blend in with on-going activities. Further, the caregiver must judge whether a comment from an adult who is outside the flow of the activity will seriously jeopardize the children's concentration and control or whether a well-placed fingerplay will further extend the complexity of the activity.

The following examples should serve to highlight the fragile sense of timing needed and the powerful extender of thought which fingerplays can provide in program settings. A windy day in the late fall with several children outside, running around in circles trying to catch up with the debris falling and swirling around the yard led one caregiver to insert this fingerplay into the activity as several children plopped down in mock exhaustion from all their running:

Whirling twirling round and round
Leaves go up and leaves go down.
Some above are swirling high,
Some below go rolling by.
Swirling high or rolling by
Come catch the leaves - yes, come and try.

A very involved story discussion of Maurice Sendak's Where the Wild Things Are, led one caregiver to introduce this fingerplay:

Wild things clawing at the air,
They're just pretend, not really there.
In play I curl and stretch my claws
When pretending to have animal paws.
My claws can curl and stretch and bend,
Just like real fingers that are not pretend.

This particular fingerplay, besides capturing the content of the story and extending children's thought, very nicely involved many of the spontaneous finger movements children expressed throughout the discussion.

Still another example of the spontaneous use of fingerplays is illustrated in this anecdote: New large pieces of colored chalk at the easel had attracted several children in the three-year-old group. Two children were using the chalk to draw pictures, a third was waltzing around behind these two making imaginary tracings of the real pictures. A caregiver extended the imitative action of the third child with this fingerplay:

> Draw a circle for the face.
> Put the eyes and nose in place.
> Add a mouth with a great big smile,
> It's your turn in a little while.
> (Children can substitute the pronoun "my" for "your" in the last line.)

Caregivers who choose to use fingerplays in a spontaneous manner must be supported by a good stock of appropriate fingerplays. Some caregivers who favor this method of using fingerplays keep small file boxes tucked in handy corners with fingerplays filed under appropriate categories. Others prefer to rely on memory and will devote a portion of time once a week to refreshing their current mental stock and adding fingerplays that are seasonal or specific to ongoing activities in the program. In addition to the sources listed at the end of this article, caregivers will find children's magazines and the activity pages of instructional magazines good sources for timely fingerplay suggestions. Some caregivers will simply make-up fingerplays to suit the occasion. Not everyone is gifted with this quick-think ability, but most will find that a few moments a week spent anticipating probable topics for fingerplays will result in a reasonable collection of appealing, homemade fingerplays.

Transition use. Using fingerplays to signal or to smooth over transition

times in programs for young children requires considerable forethought on the part of caregivers. As noted before, transitional uses of fingerplays can add greatly to the overall integration of program activities and prevent the need for less positive management techniques. In a sense, fingerplays are preventive management techniques which seek to redirect and focus energies in situations where appropriate behavior cues are not particularly obvious for children. Fingerplays can create some meaningful and expected behavior cues in such situations.

Caregivers who choose to use fingerplays as transitional tools will probably focus first on recurring transition times in their programs; thus, the end of clean-up, the beginning and end of snack time, etc. As programs mature and children begin to participate in events which occur with some frequency, caregivers may choose to add other fingerplays to introduce these occasional events such as lining-up for library, introducing a visitor, preparing for the arrival of special subject instructors, etc.

In using fingerplays as transitional tools the caregiver will be guided by the following suggestions for use. The caregiver should be very familiar with the fingerplay. This enables others in their absence who are not regular caregivers to carry on with effective transitional periods. Caregivers should position themselves in such a way that by posture and visual image, children are drawn to observe the caregiver's finger actions, and most importantly, children can hear the fingerplay verse. Since fingerplays are used to smooth over transitions, caregivers should choose a position that is near the site of the next activity so that as children participate in the fingerplay, they are incidentally preparing themselves for the next activity.

The following brief anecdotes highlight the effective use of fingerplays in transitional situations in programs with young children. Fifteen boys and girls were gathering slowly on the rug as they finished struggling with boots,

raincoats, hats and gloves and finally mastering the difficult task of fitting everything in the appropriate cubby. This first meeting at the beginning of the afternoon was often short and designed simply to help children plan ahead regarding their activities for the next part of the program. The caregiver led the children in a fingerplay which focused on the kind of weather and the things they would have seen on their way to the programs.

Is the sun shinning or is there rain today?
Should we rake up the leaves or shovel snow away?
Sun shinning, rainy day, leaves to rake, shovel away.
What is the weather like outside today?

As the majority of the group gathered and the children's attention began to turn to what was available for free-choice activities, the caregiver introduced a fingerplay concerning the concept of making decisions and thinking about what to do next.

What can I do when it's time to play?
Shall I make a ball or a log out of clay?
Shall I dress up in a hat and coat,
Or walk to the water table and then sail a boat?
Shall I paint at the easel with the brush in my hand,
Or tap with the sticks to a record of a band?
What shall I do, I'm going to think
And when I know what to play with I'll give you a wink.

Young children are not very good at lining-up. Wiggly bodies, short attention spans, concern over position in line, and concern over "where are we going?" typically combine to make lining-up a logistical gamble. Fingerplays such as the one below used by a caregiver in a day care center can be used to help young children rehearse the situation of lining-up.

Choo Choo Choo Choo,	(As children recite each word "Choo" the leader
Choo Choo Choo Choo,	taps children to get in line.)
Train sounds fine.	(Reciting these lines provides time for children
Train sounds fine.	who were tapped to line up.)
Choo Choo Choo Choo,	(Leader taps more children for their turn to get
Choo Choo Choo Choo,	in line.)
Get in line.	(Waiting time for children to line up.)
Get in line.	

Choo Choo Choo Choo,
Choo Choo Choo Choo,
Moving down the track.
Choo Choo Choo Choo,
Choo Choo Choo we're leaving,
But we'll be back. (Line begins to move from the setting.)

(Line forms a train by each child putting one hand on the shoulder of the person in front of him and using the other hand to continue the Choo Choo movement.)

Fingerplays appropriate for use in transitional periods can be obtained from a number of sources. Books and children's magazines are likely sources, but often overlooked are word-of-mouth and the current practice of other caregivers. Other adults who work with young children are frequently the best source of verse and action which can be set to fingerplay to handle routines. Fingerplays for transitional use do not require compiling a big supply. Once identified, one or two fingerplays for each transition will generally suffice. Children frequently prefer the most familiar fingerplays.

Instructional supplements. Instructional use of fingerplays is the most formal and most deliberate of techniques for incorporating fingerplay into programs for young children. Used to introduce, motivate, extend, and supplement instruction, fingerplays are at once versatile and enjoyable. Caregivers who avoid formal instruction of young children can look to fingerplays as wonderful tidbits of information. Caregivers who do use formal instructional periods can look to fingerplays as aids in the learning process. Whatever the approach of instruction, fingerplays can be extremely useful.

Fingerplays used for instructional purposes must be learned by children. Thus, for instructional purposes, the caregiver must use effective techniques for helping children learn fingerplays. The next section presents suggestions for helping young children learn fingerplays.

Helping Children Learn Fingerplays

Probably the single most important factor in regard to the leader's effectiveness in teaching fingerplays is how well that leader knows the material. Even though leaders may be enthusiastic using verse and finger actions and apply adequate voice level and clarity, if the rhymes are presented inadequately or inconsistently children have difficulty in learning to recite and perform them on their own. Caregivers should use the techniques they find operational in learning the rhymes and actions to be used. For example, some persons who use them benefit by keeping a file of collected fingerplays handy for study at moments when time prohibits being involved in other duties or for quick reference to be used in those teachable moments. Others may rely on wall charts and posters with the printed verses and pictured finger actions within view from various positions in the setting to be used on the spot. Suspending signs from the ceiling or wires between ceiling lights, or from clotheslines in an outdoor setting, are further suggestions for having fingerplays available within immediate eyesight. Chalkboards, bulletin boards, and large chart tablets too are also adequate places for storing or displaying verses for ready reference. These rhymes openly displayed serve both to help caregivers thoroughly learn the fingerplays and provide written examples for working on reading readiness activities with young children. These displays of talk written down, letters for recognition, and the left to right concept of following a line of print are part of reading readiness exercises. Lastly, a little used but appropriate space for storing collected fingerplays in the tape recorder. These recordings can be played as listening activities for the children or for guidance as the children's leader memorizes verses and practices finger actions.

Teaching Steps

Caregivers who want to teach fingerplays to their children find a step-by-step instructional technique appropriate and effective. With adaptations where necessary due to the varying degrees of children's abilities and fingerplay complexities, these steps should be followed to teach verses and accompanying finger actions.

1. First, the leader clearly recites the fingerplay verse while accurately performing the finger dramatization.
2. Having seen the demonstration, the children then practice only finger actions as the leader recites the verse for them.
3. Next, the rhyme is learned by the group.
4. After practicing each part, the rhyme and finger actions are slowly executed together.
5. Eventually, the children recite and dramatize the whole fingerplay without the model to follow and soon perform individually.

Caregivers should find that by applying this teaching format to each newly presented action rhyme their children quickly adapt to the experience and begin to build a valuable repertoire of fingerplays.

Making Up Fingerplays

As caregivers begin to use fingerplays more regularly, they may recognize the need to make up rhymes and finger actions to supplement their repertoire. To make up verses with actions, the designers may pick up cues for content ideas that are readily available within the children's environment. As children play, they identify interests, use materials, and apply words they enjoy, understand, or yet need to know more about. The alert caregiver can recognize these statements of children's interests and design fingerplays to help meet their expressed

needs. As children use their hands in daily activities, they may find some movements particularly enjoyable. These motions incorporated into fingerplays would provide a motivation for using the rhyme and activity taught by the leader. Children who discover they can snap their fingers would readily participate in fingerplays allowing them to use this newly acquired skill. The caregiver designing fingerplays may wish to provide practice in counting and can do so by combining the snapping movement with some element of counting.

> One snap, two snaps, maybe three or four,
> If I use both hands I can snap more.
> Snap at the window, snap at the floor,
> Snap at the ceiling, and snap at the door.
> Snapping, snapping one, two, three,
> You can snap at lots of things,
> But please don't snap at me.

Another source of fingerplay ideas is the existing collection of poems, stories, and songs composed for children. With a little adaptation, these literary forms can be redesigned as fingerplays. Many children's songs already have had finger actions added to them. Previously learned fingerplays, too, can be used as a source of new plays by making slight alterations or additions.

When the caregiver decides to design a new fingerplay it is first necessary to identify the reason, topic, or need to be satisfied by using the activity. Brainstorming to collect ideas, rhyming words, and catchy rhythms provides a store of material that can then be positioned, arranged, and rearranged, to form the fingerplay that now becomes a part of the collection and may be added to the file, notebook, or recording.

Summary

Fingerplays are enjoyable and versatile additions to program activities. Fingerplays provide an informal opportunity to practice manipulative and coordination skills. As instructional supplements in a variety of content areas, finger-

plays foster the development of intellectual and language skills. Caregivers of young children often choose to use fingerplays as a positive management technique. Fingerplays can be easily incorporated into program activities through spontaneous incorporation, transition use, and as instructional supplements. Techniques for helping children learn fingerplays are simple and direct and the mutual participation of both caregivers and children in making up fingerplays is a satisfying experience for all. Fingerplays offer opportunity for many enjoyable experiences which contribute to children's overall development.